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The Student-Writer

A Little Talk Every Month with Those Interested in the Technique of Literature.

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"SNOWBALLING" A PLOT.

BY the term "snowballing" a plot, I do not mean throwing things at it. No doubt, many plots need such drastic treatment, but in this case the phrase has been coined to express the process of rolling up ideas as a huge snowball is rolled, by turning the nucleus over and over, with an added accumulation at each revolution.

The experienced writer does not attempt the Herculean task of writing a story out of hand. There is an easy, simple way of going about plot building, as opposed to harder and more harrowing methods. Forcing their plots into premature crystallization is one of the mistakes of ambitious writers. Instead of rolling up a natural, symmetrical, well-packed ball of ideas, they punch their thoughts together into a lumpy, awkward, insecure mass.

Practically all successful authors have adopted the plan of turning their ideas over and over in order to perfect them. The principle lies behind many idiosyncrasies of genius. Charles Hoyt developed a play by repeatedly talking over the plot with long-suffering acquaintances. Each time, the outline would be slightly elaborated and strengthened. When it was, so to speak, rolled and packed to his satisfaction, he was ready to commence the actual composition.

Balzac's method was to write out his ideas in preliminary form and then have them set up in type. When the proof sheet came from the printer, he would cut down, revise, and greatly elaborate—until there was no more room for insertions. This copy went again to the printer for correction and a new proof sheet was returned. Gradually, the nucleus would be rolled up into its final form. No doubt, the author of the *Comedie Humaine* would have simplified his method, had he lived in this day of the typewriter.

Any "turning over" process is likely to prove valuable. But the student writer is often in the dark about beginnings. How is he to capture the germinal idea—the nucleus?

There are many ways. For the majority of writers, the best

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method is to begin with the theme; then to devise characters and incidents to prove the truth of the conception. I am convinced that the wrong way to go about fiction building is to look for actual incidents upon which to hang stories. The advice, "study the newspapers for plot suggestions," is responsible for two-thirds of the commonplace, mediocre stories with which the editors are bombarded. Read the newspapers—yes; be alert to what is going on; in every possible way, keep your ears attuned to life and human nature. But employ the insight thus gained for making your purely imaginary incidents convincing.

The only way in which, as a rule, an actual incident may be effectively employed in plot manufacture is to dissect the incident and extract the principle that it illustrates, then employ that as the theme of a purely imaginary story.

Let us, by way of illustration, set about to reproduce the mental process of "snowballing" a plot. As I write these lines, I have no notion what theme I will select for development, but I have a definite idea of the way to go about finding it. A calm, confident, unhurried attitude of mind is of great importance. The idea, once found, must be allowed to grow naturally and of its own accord, into a symmetrical story. Our part is to keep turning it over and over, so that an accumulation of ideas may have a chance to adhere to the basic conception.

The first essential, of course, is the idea. And, remembering that actual incidents are likely to make commonplace material, instead of culling over the yellow newspapers, or searching through our notebooks, we will look within ourselves for some thought of sufficient importance to be worthy of impressing on readers through the medium of fiction.

This basic idea, or theme, may be almost any abstract principle, ideal, or bit of philosophy. "When Fortune flatters, she does it to betray," wrote Publius Syrus. This suggests the story of an unworthy man whose nature is betrayed by the use he makes of his money. "Mother love" is an abstract idea capable of illustration in many striking ways. "Intuition is more trustworthy than reason"—if you think so, prove your point by endowing a certain character with intuition, another with reason, and turning the conception over until it evolves into a plot.

A hundred such themes present themselves on the spur of the moment; they contain possibilities, but not all of them appeal to us as being our particular story—the one we wish to develop. We are exacting.

Let's see—suppose we develop a story on the subject of "Heredity." Come to think of it, though, that has been used a good

many times in fiction, so the chances are that we would be wasting our effort upon it. Try again. For a good, live subject, how does the word "Preparedness" sound? Not so bad, as we consider it. Rightly handled, that word may serve as the nucleus for our snowball. Here it is, then, a tiny, compact ball of possibilities:

Preparedness.

Now for the initial turn over. The first thing we notice is that this word has two poles. We will have to take a definite stand—our story must prove something. Are we for, or against?

It happens that we are neutral; the subject is too big for us. But since, just now, preparedness advocates seem to be in the majority, we reason that the "anti" side is less likely to have been written up; so, just to get started, we decide to make our story prove that side. The first roll of our snowball, thus, evolves it into this form:

The best protection is non-preparedness.

Second turn. Now begin to arise questions. What characters shall we select? In what setting shall we place the story? Shall we involve two European countries, or perhaps the United States and some other nation? Heavens, no! That will take the subject entirely out of our reach—and anyway, this situation is what suggested our theme. The farther we get away from it, the more likely we shall be to maintain a clear perspective.

Short story unity of impression depends largely upon limiting the cast to the fewest possible characters. Our situation must be one involving not more than two or three persons. And the reader's interest must be centered, in particular, upon a certain one of these characters.

Let us take stock of our idea and its present accumulation:

The theme that the best policy is unpreparedness is to be illustrated by a small cast centering around one character. This character is to pursue the policy of unpreparedness and to win out by it in a situation that ordinarily would be met with armed resistance.

Third turn. This does not as yet look much like a story; still, it is quite an elaboration upon our original snowball. At least, we know what general type of situations and characters are needed.

Now, it will be a good plan to consider several tentative settings and situations:

Suppose we place the scene in "big S" Society. A number of debutantes may be arming themselves with feminine weapons of conquest, the object being preparedness for the attack when a titled foreigner comes wife-hunting. Surely there is a story in the capture of this lion by a simple little maiden who has been too artless (or artful, as the case may be) to prepare for conquest.

But that does not altogether suit us; some better use of the material may suggest itself. Suppose we transpose the gender and shift the scene from Society to frontier. Surely, if unpreparedness is capable of standing the test, it will have good opportunity of doing so in a typical mining camp, where every man carries a gun and is prepared to use it at an instant's notice. Among all these hair-trigger natures, a "Prince of Peace" who refuses to decorate his person with hardware, may be a unique personality. We might have him confronted by armed bandits while carrying a fortune in gold down an unfrequented trail. It seems not impossible to devise a working out of this situation in which his unarmed position saves his own life and enables him to retain the gold.

Or, we might transpose the scene to the University. Picture the "grind" who is studying night and day in preparation for after life, while his frivolous roommate, who does not believe in preparedness, has a good time. According to the fable of the Grasshopper and the Ants, the grind is due to come out on top; but it will not be difficult for us to write a story in which the roommate, who devoted less time to preparation, stumbles into the fat, responsible position, while the grind becomes one of his clerks.

But that is old; the probability is that George Ade has at some time made better use than we can of the material.

We might lay the scene on the border of Mexico, letting an unprotected American save himself and his family by means of a striking policy of disarmament. Or we might—

But, after all, the mining camp suggestion contains good possibilities for a vital illustration of our theme. We may tentatively decide upon it and proceed with our rolling process. This is how we now stand:

That unpreparedness is the best protection is to be proven in a gold camp-setting, by a hero who refuses to adopt preparedness. While burdened with treasure, he is confronted by bandits. The situation is such that, if he had been armed, he would have been killed. As a direct result of being unarmed, he escapes both with his life and his treasure.

Fourth turn. That phrase, "As a direct result of being unarmed," is important. The story must satisfy this condition. If there is no clear connecting link between our hero's escape and his lack of arms, our anti-preparedness demonstration will fall flat.

We know now that our hero is going to get the best of the highwaymen through being unarmed; but the details are slow in materializing. However, the preliminary situation is not difficult to imagine. It has, so to speak, adhered to our nucleus without any particular effort on our part. We begin to visualize the situation. There must be a central character, the advocate of non-preparedness. And his presence seems to call for a contrast with some more

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the warlike temperament who is violently in favor of "gun toting." It is easy to imagine these two as partners, riding along with the treasure between them—arguing the question of its safe transport. The hero advocates leaving all weapons at home. His partner has insisted upon stocking up with artillery. They arrive at a dangerous pass, where their theories are put to the test. Opposed by a superior force, their fight seems certain to be a losing one. So we have an opportunity to compare the tactics in actual practice.

This has been quite a turn over. Let us pause and warm our hands, while proudly surveying the present state of our snowball.

Steve Anti, and his partner, Scotty Pro, are wending their way to town, heavily laden with gold dust from their rich placer in the hills. Buck McGinnis and his band of outlaws are known to be at large in the neighborhood. Buck's reputation is a fright! He openly flaunts a trophy consisting of a huge diamond plucked from the necktie of a capitalist tenderfoot. Steve Anti laments the display of hardware he has been persuaded to hang around his belt, protesting that it simply invites attack. Scotty has never heard such foolishness! How are they going to protect their gold in case some one else wants it! The argument waxes warm, but remains unsettled, when they approach Dead Man's Gulch, where the outlaws are known to lie in wait. Unable to agree as to a mode of procedure, the two decide to part company. The gold is divided and distributed inconspicuously about the person of each man. Then Steve passes his rifle, his revolver, and his ammunition, over to Scotty, whose warlike nature fairly revels in being thus doubly armed. They draw lots. The winner is to take the lead, the other to follow fifteen minutes behind him. Neither, in any circumstance, is to jeopardize his share of the gold by coming to the other's assistance in case of trouble.

Our snowball is getting cumbersome now. Already we have the setting, the characters, and a stage all set for the climax. The nature of that climax is clearly in mind, but we are hazy about details. The best plan, since our characters seem to have come to life so readily, and to be displaying such marked individuality, is to follow them. Maybe the author will learn something from his creations. Already we have commenced to have a lot of respect for Steve Anti. He seems such an original thinker—and look at the risk he is taking, just for the sake of an ideal. We suspect that he will prove thrillingly audacious in a pinch. Let's see, he is tall and sinewy, and he looks like a Christie hero, except that the razor slipped a couple of times as he was hacking loose a month's growth of whiskers before starting to town. He has the eyes of a dreamer combined with the firm chin of action; and something about his mouth suggests a keen sense of humor. As for Scotty—well, though he wasn't thought of in time for the leading role, still we can't help a sneaking sympathy for the man. He's certainly full of ginger. One look at his bristling red hair—he took no chances with the razor—is enough to tell us he's spoiling for a fight. Knowing our

climax in advance, of course, we realize that Scotty hasn't a chance at the showdown, and it is a trifle difficult not to feel sorry for him. If Scotty knew this, he would scornfully tell us to save our pity for the outlaws.

Time's up. Now for another look at our snowball.

The toss-up results in giving Steve Anti the first chance to find out the truth regarding a Hereafter. Stripped of all defensive weapons, he rides forth; even his coat has been abandoned, in order that his absolute unpreparedness may be apparent at a glance. A solidly filled belt of gold is the only object surrounding his waist. He rides through the pass and is not in any way molested. His psychology begins to look reasonable. Why should bandits attack a man who obviously has nothing about him worth carrying a weapon to defend? So he—

But this fraction of a turn makes us realize that the climax of our story is going to be without dramatic action. We are proving our point in altogether too peaceful and uneventful a way. It will never do to disappoint the reader, who has been led to think there will be a real encounter with bandits. We now must contrive to bring them on the scene. Amended, our outline therefore reads:

Steve rides through the pass but a short distance, when he is suddenly confronted by half a dozen armed bandits. They are strangers to him, but he recognizes the dreaded Buck McGinnis by the famous diamond flashing from his shirt front. "Stop and give an account of yourself!" is the terrible command. Steve obeys, though he regrets that those who make the request belong to the dark ages of preparedness. "Seen anything of a sorrel horse," inquires Steve nonchalantly, rolling a cigarette.

There being no show of resistance, the highwaymen are not quite sure it is worth their while to parley with this stranger. Steve dismounts. "Where you going?" demands McGinnis. "Thought I'd take a look down this gully," responds Steve, as he starts off. The bandits glance at one another. "Come back," yells McGinnis. "Your sorrel ain't down there. Jump on your nag and hurry—get to blazes out o' here!" So Steve, apparently against his will, is not only passed up by the gang as unworthy their prowess, but even assisted on his way. They don't want him around.

A short distance down the road, he draws rein, listening tensely. There it comes! A sudden rattle of shots. He knows that Scotty is putting up a good fight, but the odds against him make the result a foregone conclusion. Steve, forgetful of the compact, spurs his horse to the aid of his unfortunate partner. But the shots suddenly cease—it is all over. Sadly, Steve resumes his townward journey. How foolish to make an arsenal of oneself, thus inviting destruction!

Arrived at his destination, he enters a thirst emporium and breaks the news. It is sad news, for Scotty was well liked by these rough miners and frontiersmen. "Poor Scotty," murmurs many a voice, as our story comes to a close. "He was a mighty fine little cuss—but too all-fired 'prepared' for a scrap to get along well in this world."

So there we have the final roll of the snowball. It can be given much further polishing, and the actual narration is still to be ac-

complished; but our nucleus has truly developed into a definitely rounded story. The point has been clearly illustrated— But whoa, Bill!

Our snowball has taken another complete flop, before we could prevent. Who walks into the thirst emporium, and into the story again, but the late lamented Scotty! We stare with eyes as wide as any frontiersman present, including Steve—but if that isn't Scotty, staggering in the door under two rifles and a wagon load of belts and ammunition, it certainly is his earth-bound spirit. That he isn't an apparition quickly becomes apparent.

"Gimme whiskey and make it straight!" he roars, in approved western style. "I'm dying o' thirst." He glares around balefully, until his eyes light on the open-mouthed Steve. "Why the Sam Hill didn't you come back and give me a lift with all this junk?" he demands. "Whadda you think I am—a pack mule?"

So saying, he disburdens himself of half a dozen well-filled money belts, enough revolvers to supply the whole camp, and last, but not least, Buck McGinnis's much-flaunted diamond. "Run out, some o' you scum," he barks, setting down the emptied glass, "and see if the batch o' hosses I corralled on the way down is tied fast to the hitching bar. I had too big a thirst to look back."

It is a shame; Scotty ought not to have done it; but he was a trouble-maker from the first. Remember how he broke into the cast when he wasn't even considered in the original line-up, and how he made us have a sort of sneaking liking for him in spite of his taking the wrong side of the argument? Now, at the last, he comes bursting in to take away all the hero's laurels. He's a rank usurper.

But it is to be feared we'll have to leave him in, because the one unpardonable sin in plot making is to let your story come out exactly as it seems destined to. Prove your point, yes; but also watch your opportunity to introduce some twist at the conclusion which gives the whole subject an altered complexion.

Such, in brief, is a good working illustration of "snowballing" a plot. Far from being difficult, it is as easy as one desires to make it—and intensely interesting. Let a day or so elapse for each turning over if desired. Then, in the evening, write down just as much or as little as has accumulated around the idea since the last time it was reduced to paper. We couldn't have jumped at once from the nucleus idea to the final story, "A Matter of Preparedness." So we put down what we knew of the story, then turned it over until something more came to mind, and kept the up process until a stage was reached when the idea came to life and we were startled to find that our abstract thought had grown into a full-fledged story outline, complete even to the twist in the conclusion.

Try it. You will find it a developer of inspiration and the most dependable of all plot making recipes.

MORE COMMENTS AND OPINIONS.

SO interesting has been my correspondence during the past month that I want to share it with all readers of The Student-Writer. Only a skimming of the letters received can be given. Most have been highly complimentary. Perhaps this is because those who disapproved of the magazine did not bother to write me. A few letters of more critical nature have found their way to the editor's desk, of which the strongest are quoted below. What one writer has to say about the doubtful value of literary agents in the marketing field is more than true. It can not be too firmly impressed that writers will gain far more in results and experience by marketing their own work than by letting any one else do it for them. I speak from experience on both sides of the business. It is the practice of many so-called literary agents to bundle up a heap of manuscripts indiscriminately and send to some editor or publishing house. If the editor happens to have a reader at liberty, he may have him go through the pile. More often, it returns to the agent unread, with a printed slip of refusal.

This method is not countenanced in by any conscientious agent; but it must be repeated that no agent has any "pull" with the magazines which enables him to place mediocre work, and I believe that the majority of editors prefer to deal with authors directly.

It will be noted that with this issue The Student-Writer is making application for entry to the postoffice as second-class matter, and that in order to get in a superabundance of matter, I have been obliged to increase the number of pages. When the circulation justifies, it is hoped to make this increase permanent. A number of departments are in mind, awaiting only the opportunity to burst into reality. The best way to bring into existence a larger magazine, including additional features, is to send in as many subscription orders as you can, together with orders for criticism, typing, and special courses, which will insure the already promising prosperity of the "workshop."

I have received your circulars, and Student-Writer.

Yes, I am an author, or rather a writer, there being a distinction. As a literary agent you are in a business that has as black an eye as Moran received from Willard. Literary agents, book agents, drummers, evangelists are known as guys with the gift o' gab; out for the coin. If these professors, associate editors, readers for editors, and workers in a magazine office, who modestly claim to receive Maupassssannnttts By Mail for anything from 20 bones to 100 know so much about it why don't they write stories themselves, and thus grow rich as Du Pont? Yes, bo, they do write stories, but 'tis a damned sight more profitable to work authors than editors for a living. For every ten writers there is a literary agent, and 'tis a poor one indeed who hasn't an "individual course in short story writing."

Once upon a time I bucked up against the literary agents, and they got my money and I got the experience and they are still after my few hard earned dollars, for every time I ship a story to a magazine some one in the office copies my name and address for future use when he will become a literary agent. "Formerly as a reader of several magazines I became acquainted with your work. Now, with my experience as to what editors want I can," etc.

Of course, I know nothing about you. You may be a good, conscientious fellow, go to church, tip your hat even to the homely ladies, put something aside for the baby, or for some one else's baby. But I do know that it won't pay me to have you or any other agent handle my stuff, revise it and give me a course in story writing. I have made MSS. for 15 years, and some day I may start out as a literary agent myself. Like you and like a thousand more I could tell the kid writers a lot of things that would help them, and get such testimonials as "I thank you for your frank and honest criticism," etc. I might sell some MSS. for others, but editors are not in love with literary agents, who dump thousands of MSS. on them every day in freight load lots. Any author can send a story to any editor, and that's all you can do. You haven't a shadow of a pull with any editor, unless you are fool enough to believe what editors tell you. 'Tis a business policy with them never to commit themselves. They never do it un-

less you know them very well, and the few I know well enough by their first names generally say, "For God's sake, shunt your yarns to another ed! I got \$60 today and—." (This is writing suggestively, one of the fine points in the short spasm masterpiece!)

Guess there is nothing doing 'tween you and me. I thank you for your little mag. What you say is true enough and also obvious enough for a fellow who knows a little about the game. What you say about the very original story is straight, and it hasn't been told in print often, but the old-timers know that the ancient bunk, with modern trimmings, brings in the kale sooner than a surprisingly original story, which editors know readers put in the nut list. In fact, one of the most original writers (a fellow with genius) that I ever met, was a fit inmate for a lunatic asylum. No offense meant, Hawkins. Just giving you my point of view.

* * * *

Yesterday I received the samples you sent me of your Student-Writer. I thank you for them. I have a word to say along the lines of your work which I hope you will take kindly.

You laud C. H. Claudy for making his hero take the bulb of his camera in his mouth and hold the end of the tube above the water. Did it not occur to you that if he did that he could only expel his breath, the valve working in only one direction?

I'll bet a hat that nine out of ten boys who have used cameras would get on to that at the first reading. Had he held the tube in his mouth the bulb would have risen to the top and floated with the intake valve uppermost and he could have drawn air in and expelled it into the water. As he used it he must have been drowned and Claudy will find his body there now.

To leave Claudy and drop to my level.

I am new, I am green, I am a man past middle age who has dropped the building business to take up writing after thinking about it from his twelfth year. I believe in thoroughness, therefore when I am writing a story I use my atlas, my encyclopedia, many books of reference of different kinds, the daily papers, reports of officials and conversations with men in many lines of work.

Then, after painstaking efforts to secure accuracy and reliable data, I am criticised by eastern editors for making a scene, that I have taken bodily from official lips, improbable. I find there are many editors who will believe any old story about Europe or Asia or Africa and scoff at a truthful tale about this coast. I wrote my first story less than a year ago, receiving a check for \$75 from The Youth's Companion for it. I have sold, altogether, up to date, \$812 worth and the first part of the year, up to September, I worked at my building business and wrote evenings. Then I dropped the old business and went at writing in earnest. Have I a right to think I am fairly well started on the road?

With regard to criticisms of manuscript, I need them and have been getting remarkably helpful ones from the editors of The Youth's Companion, Arthur S. Hoffman of Adventure, and Walter K. Towers of The American Boy. Three as good friends as I want in this world and I know them only through my writings.

When you have manuscripts to criticise please impress on the writers the need of being true to local conditions and geography. One writer made his hero ride from San Pedro to Easthampton by trolley and the nearest town of that name is in New York.

He could have found Compton and Downey and San Gabriel and half a hundred other names of towns easily reached by trolley, but he was not accurate enough to care about looking them up. That stuff is about like giving an Alaskan Indian the same dialect as an educated Scotchman, as one writer did in January. Or using the same dialect for a German and a darkey from Alabama. That was done this winter. And the dialect attributed to the French —Lord save us—it is awful!

* * * *

(From the same writer, later.) I wrote you saying I did not want your Student-Writer, but tonight I read the sample copies over and decided I did want it. Not only that, but I want it sent to my son and a friend, so I enclose a check for seventy-five cents. I got more than that amount of good out of the two copies tonight. I have sold some more stuff, and my total for nine and a half months is now \$852. Not bad for a beginner, who has worked as a carpenter and as a contractor for dwellings all his life, since he was twenty-one. When I finished reading your publications, I put them down and began a story, which I have just finished at 11:30 p. m. What will you bet it is not accepted?

* * * *

I thank you very much for the article, "Plot and Climax Essentials." It almost persuaded me—not to take your short story course but—that my idea of plot may some day clear up sufficiently for me to be able to write a short story—one or two attempts to do so in the past having resulted in worthless sketches. Whatever else you may be able to do, you are certainly a good ad-

vertising man—you get in the "punch" and the "heart throbs," and make your ads. live in the reader's life. But I am sorry that you are a specialist along the line of short story writing, because what I need (next after money) is diagnosing. I do not know what my disease is. I may not have the short story fever after all. I have the right attitude of mind from your point of view. I enjoy writing for writing's sake; I go even further—for I am egotistical and think that I can excel in some lines of thought, although I cannot express the thoughts in correct form and style. But I would like to sell thought, and I know that only certain thoughts clothed in certain style will sell. I do not understand the demand, nor how to fill it. Perhaps, if I ever have any money, I will ask you about it. Perhaps your article, "Can We Afford to Be Original?" might clear it up a little, but I have not read it yet.

* * * *

Two copies of your Student-Writer received. They strike me as being both clever and practical—a rare combination. I want to see more of them. Enclosed find two subscriptions.

* * * *

I received the February and March numbers of your little magazine and enjoyed them very much. You certainly know how to hit the nail on the head. Enter me on your books as a subscriber at once, my subscription to begin with the January number.

* * * *

I have seen issue No. 3, and it has commended itself to me very much. In what you have written the "fluff," so common, is conspicuous by its absence. I am able to write spongy stuff plenteously, and so can recognize writing with bone in it. I wish for great success in your effort to instruct others.

* * * *

This is to express my thanks for the two copies of The Student-Writer which have just come to my desk. I can think of but one reason why every writer or near-writer (which is me) in the United States would not send the quarter so modestly asked for a year's subscription; and that is, that they have not yet observed the beam of the little candle.

* * * *

I enclose herewith twenty-five cents for a year's subscription to The Student-Writer. Success to your new venture. I read and reread, with interest and profit, your first three issues. Your introductory article in the current number, and especially the simile comparing the literary career to a long road, impressed me greatly. Hereafter I will heed your advice and enjoy the many pleasures of the wayside, letting the goal care for itself.

* * * *

The Student-Writer reached me yesterday, and I hasten to send stamps for the twenty-five cents, for subscription for the year. I am just in love with the little magazine, and feel sure that it will be a success. I have numbers two and three. Will you kindly send the first number also, as I do not want to miss a single number.

* * * *

I am enclosing twenty-five cents, your subscription price, and hope you will succeed, for there is a field for that kind of publication. If you do not get out another number, I have received my money's worth many times over in your article, "Can We Afford to Be Original?" I asked a vaudeville manager once why he allowed so many old jokes to be perpetrated on his stage. His answer was, "Don't they bring a laugh?" I had to own that they did. Then he said, "Did you ever notice how few laugh at a new joke?"

* * * *

I have read your Student-Writer with much interest. Every article seemed to be straight to the point. I would suggest that a little space be used to tell just how ideas may be procured to build stories upon. If some honest-to-goodness author would tell how some of his stories happened, I think it would be helpful.

* * * *

Just another testimonial to add to those you are publishing in the rear section of your little magazine. I find the paper not so bulky as to be tiresome, and the articles covered very neatly.

* * * *

I wish to say that for practical advice the second number of The Student-Writer was the best of its kind that I have ever had—and I gained one good working idea from it. I enclose money order for two years' subscription.

The Student-Writer is the most valuable output of its kind that I have seen. It is direct, intelligent, everything in it is clearly put, and it deals with exactly what the beginning writer needs to know, when he is at that stage that he doesn't know exactly what he does need.

You are at liberty to use the above paragraph, if it will serve you, and put my name to it also—for the benefit of Washington people, with whom my name might carry a little weight.

Particularly good is the telling that power of narration grows with persevering work. Henry James said, "The way to learn to write is to write;" but you have taken the trouble to elaborate the same idea with such care and clarity that it penetrates.

SOPHIA FISHER PARSONS.

* * * *

I wish to thank you for sending me the first and second copies of The Student-Writer. I found many interesting points about writing in your talks. They were dressed in a manner which made them appear fresh—lending me inspiration and eagerness to begin writing tonight where I left off, a trifle worn out and dejected, the night before. Another magazine of the same type of a few years ago brought to me that inspiration, and it does today, to a certain extent, but not in the same old way—something is lacking—that fire which used to be so prominent—and my only explanation is, it has nearly lost its punch! It appeared to me today, as I read over your talks, that you have taken up the work where this other publication left off a year or so ago. Being so far removed from the center of magazine activities, your workshop being so near, and the seeming heart to heart talk I have found in your little sheet, causes me to set down the above.

Your article, "Plot and Climax Essentials," is the most elucidating I have ever read on that subject. It is excellent.

* * * *

I wish I knew who had sent you my name, so I could say "Thank you." The February and March numbers of The Student-Writer have just been received and read within the hour and I am enthusiastically sending you twenty-five cents for some more. "The Attitude of Mind" is the most sane, encouraging thing I ever read.

I am 'most thirty, and it is only within the past year or so that I have been trying to get anything published. The Mother's Magazine actually paid me \$25 for a story this winter. Their standard seems to be getting higher, however, so I am daily expecting the return of an article I sent them two weeks ago. In case they send a check, however, one dollar of it will at once go to you, together with a battered short story that nobody wants—and it at least has a climax. I hope I'm not too old to understand what is the matter wih it, and to remedy it.

* * * *

I am very glad you have started out to boost Hawkins himself, and I hope the workshop desk will always be piled high with enjoyable, profitable work.

The Student-Writer is splendid, but it has one fault—it is only eight pages instead of sixty-four. I hope you will soon be able to furnish the goody band of literary excavators with a satisfying meal in place of an appetizer. I am enclosing fifty cents (wish it could have been dollars) and want The Student-Writer to stop at my house for the next two years.

* * * *

"When remitting, tell me something about your work." "Dog my cats," as I once heard a profane old backwoods nigger say, I'm going to do it. As I do, I shudder, for I never done such a thing before, and shiver my timbers if I know why I'm doing so now.

I've read your baby's first babblings, and, to tell the truth, the youngster cooeth not so illy; so I am sending you the nervus rerum herewith. The pitance reminds me of the story of the lazy old colored uncle whom some one wanted to help along a little:

"I say, Uncle! d' you want to make a quarter?"

"Nossuh! I'se got a quahkah."

Now, Mr. Hawkins, ain't you got a quarter?

Oh, yes—about my work. I don't work; leastwise not at magazine writing. I read a great deal about writers and their troubles, till I get so discouraged I think I never could do something all that hard, and then some day the fit seizes me and I sit down and have a jolly good time writing up "Aminta's Meekness or Forty Buckets of Blood," or how a four-cylinder two-cycle engine goes round, or something like that, and send it off to the first bloomin' editor that looks likely. So far, during the last half a dozen years an average of eight out of ten stories have stald stickin' the first time out—and left me wondering what was the matter with the editor. After each such success I relapse into a period of rewriting the other twenty per cent, which as yet no

editor hath took. This last is by far my best work. It contains all of my heart's best. I really don't know what's the matter with the editors.

Now, here's a fact: notwithstanding that what success I have had has come so easily, all this talk about writing being such a tremendously tough proposition has got me scared blue; so that I have no real confidence in my work, and when it is accepted I feel as if I had been caught stealing. Isn't it just possible that the good advice is being overdone? Suppose the first day we went to school Mother-dear had taken us aside and said: "My son, you are about to set forth upon a terribly hard road. The chances are ten to one that you won't succeed. You may prepare your lessons for your teacher as hard as you will, most of the time he will spank you and send you back to your seat without even a word of explanation as to why your recitation was not acceptable. If you are really bound you have to learn something, and have your whole heart and enthusiasm in your work, after being flayed alive for several years you may, if you are very, very exceptional, become a real success and an honor to our family. So, here's my blessing, but it probably won't help you." The chances are, in such a case we'd never get more than halfway over the big bridge on the way to school.

Reading typical writers' magazines has inured me to rejections—oh yes; it's the acceptances that take the heart out of me.

* * * *

I can't tell you how glad I was to receive your letter, I have thought of you so often, and I never write a story that I do not wish for your criticism. However, I can at least afford The Student-Writer; please enter my subscription. Thank you for the two copies you sent me, I enjoyed them so much, only I wish they cost four times as much and came every week. I think the article on originality was splendid—how do you manage to express things so clearly, forcefully, and yet so simply? It answered many questions that had been puzzling me.

I know you will be pleased to hear that I sold the little novelette you were pleased to commend. Snappy Stories paid two hundred dollars for it, which seems like a fortune to me.

* * * *

Have found The Student-Writer very inspiring and helpful and am enclosing twenty-five cents for a year's subscription. Will see that the extra copies which you sent me circulate among the members of the Authors and Students Club, a small organization which I recently joined. So you may receive some more subscriptions from this vicinity.

* * * *

I was pleased to get two copies of The Student-Writer in the last mail. The article, "Plot and Climax Essentials," just seemed to clear up a lot of points about plot for me. I may add that plots are the bane of my life. I live in a country where everything and everyone around me teems with plot germs; if I can only get them "mixed" right, I'm sure I'll be deluged with checks.

* * * *

I am enclosing twenty-five cents in stamps for The Student-Writer. I do not want to miss the March number containing the remainder of that article on plot.

I am venturing a suggestion: You know the West is just full of writers in the making. Our old stand-by, The Editor, is of course indispensable to us all, but perhaps you could make The Student-Writer a little more for us westerners.

* * * *

I have received and read with great pleasure the two copies of The Student-Writer sent me. I find them very meaty and nourishing. There is no doubt that there is room for an organ not too high-flown to discuss the veriest beginnings of the art and such a one will be sure to be hailed as a godsend by many, myself included.

Am handing you the requisite quarter, for which please credit me with a subscription.

* * * *

Owing to the fact that I have been away for some time, I found, on my return, three copies of The Student-Writer awaiting me, and I hasten to express my sincere appreciation of their merit. They answer many questions for me—questions sticking around in the back of my head—which I scarcely knew how to ask or whom to ask them of. I spent a year learning a few of the simplest things you have made so clear in your little publication. You have capably handled other points on writing and given information which I have been unable to obtain from any other source.

Regarding my own work, I am giving it only my spare time at present. I wrote seven short stories with a beginner's usual success. The eighth was accepted. Since then I have written six stories and sold them at prices ranging from \$40 to \$55. Haven't had a story returned since the first one was accepted. Aside from the return in money, however, I want to get into the better class magazines, and am now devoting my time to that end. With the excellent help of your publication, and a lifetime ahead of me, I have hopes of success—one can't tell a speck about it.

A "PADDED" HAMLET.

FOR a good example of antiverbosity, or how not to do it, we have the satirical paraphrase of Hamlet's soliloquy by Sir Arthur T. Quiller-Couch. These are the opening lines of the soliloquy:

"To be, or not to be; that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take up arms * * *"

And here is Sir Arthur's version, made in mockery, yet for the instruction of many an aspirant in literature. It is from one of Sir Arthur's lectures on "The Art of Writing":

"To be, or the contrary? Whether the former or the latter be preferable would seem to admit of some difference of opinion; the answer in the present case being of an affirmative or of a negative character, according as to whether one elects on the one hand mentally to suffer the disfavor of fortune, albeit in an extreme degree, or, on the other * * *"

And so on. How many writers could take such a paragraph and, never having seen the original, reduce it to the concise, forceful phraseology of the master?

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT.

I am extremely fortunate in being able to offer writers the experienced services of Mr. John H. Clifford, who will have charge of the department of manuscript preparation in the Student-Writer workshop.

Mr. Clifford has been prominently connected with the editorial staffs of leading New York publishing houses. His record includes four years on the editorial staff of the American Book Company, schoolbook publishers, and nine years on the staff of the University Society, publishers of standard literature, young folks' books, etc. In this latter connection, he acted as managing editor in the preparation of such well known editions as Booklovers Shakespeare, 40 vols.; Dickens's works, with notes and critical comments, 30 vols.; Life and Works of Abraham Lincoln, 8 vols.; Standard History of the World, 10 vols.; Modern Eloquence, 10 vols.; Encyclopedia of Music, and other standard works. On the editorial staffs of the National Alumni, he wrote most of the connecting introductions in that excellent twenty-volume compilation, The Great Events. On the editorial staff of the Encyclopedia Americana, he wrote many articles which appear in that work.

Mr. Clifford's supervision of all manuscript typing in the Student-Writer workshop, and his revision of work submitted for that purpose, insures writers the finest possible service of this kind.

Thoroughness is the Secret of my Success as a Teacher

You do not want a superficial summary of the merits and demerits of your story, poem, article, or photoplay, but practical suggestions, based on painstaking study, which will enable you to make this and future manuscripts more salable. Hundreds of students have found that this is what my service does for them.

Writers must have in themselves the latent ability to produce literature; but often progress can be materially aided by competent instruction. The method I have developed from preparing several thousand letters of advice for student writers is, first, to consider a manuscript from the viewpoint of a general reader; second, from the viewpoint of an editor; and third, from the viewpoint I would take if I were the writer. Regarding it as if it were my own, I ask: "What is necessary to make this piece of work stronger? What changes in the plot, the characters, the style, the dialogue, and other features, are needed, before it will be in the best possible shape for submission?" The result of this threefold consideration goes to the student in the form of a constructive criticism, with list of possible markets, if the material contains salable possibilities. The rates for prose manuscripts are:

500 words or less.....	\$.50
500 to 1,000 words.....	1.00
1,000 to 2,000 words.....	1.50
2,000 to 5,000 words.....	2.00
5,000 to 7,500 words.....	2.50
7,500 to 10,000 words.....	3.00
10,000 to 15,000 words.....	4.00
15,000 to 20,000 words.....	5.00
Each 10,000 words above 20,000.....	2.50

(Thus 35,000 words would be \$8.75; 70,000 words, \$17.50, etc.)

Verse: 4 cents a line; minimum, 50 cents.

Photoplays and plays included under rates for prose.

In ordinary cases a week will suffice for a criticism. Where special haste is required, manuscripts will be returned within twenty-four hours of their receipt.

For second reading of manuscript, after revision, but half the regular fee is charged. (Thus, 2,000 words, \$1.00, etc.)

COUPON BOOKS.—Reduced rates may be obtained by paying for several criticisms at one time. Coupon books entitling to ten criticisms of stories 5,000 words or less in length, regular rate \$20.00, will be issued at \$14.00 when paid for in advance. Five coupons, value \$10.00, can be purchased for \$7.50 in advance; three, value \$6.00, for \$5.00 in advance; and two criticisms paid for at the same time will be charged at \$3.50 instead of \$4.00.

YEAR'S SUPERVISION STORY WRITING COURSE.

Experience has convinced me that I can offer students the most satisfactory assistance by taking entire supervision over their literary work for a period of a year or more. I have no set form lessons. Each student presents a different problem, and I prefer to make a study of his or her individual needs. I have found the plan successful

both with beginners and with those who have already attained a degree of success. The result with the former is to bring their work up to acceptable standards. With the latter the result is increased confidence, a more regular output, and the attainment of better markets.

The work assigned is thoroughly practical. Technique is mastered only by conceiving, planning, and writing original stories—not one story, but dozens. In accepting students, I prefer to know as much as possible about their ambitions, experience, opportunities for work, philosophy of life—a photograph is often helpful in enabling me to attain the close personal relationship desirable with the student.

While the class is described as covering a year's instruction, the supervision in most cases will extend over a longer period. Each student, no matter how slowly lessons are completed, will receive the same amount of help, though it may be extended over considerably more than a year's time.

Clients are expected to send me all their literary output, together with such questions as may occur. Plot outlines are submitted for criticism, and the more promising are developed, revised, and again revised, if necessary, until they represent the writer's best capabilities.

The fee for this course is \$100. A discount of 10 per cent is made for payment in advance. If the student prefers, however, payments may be made at \$10.00 down and \$10.00 per month, or \$25.00 down and \$25.00 quarterly thereafter, until the full \$100 is paid.

BRIEF STORY WRITING COURSE.—A series of individual criticisms constitutes a short course in story writing. The student may secure a pronounced discount by paying for ten criticisms in advance, as above explained.

TYPING SERVICE.—Experienced typists who have been trained to prepare letter-perfect manuscripts for submission to the editors, are employed in the "workshop." Rates:

Type Copying (with ordinary corrections in punctuation, spelling, etc.) with carbon copy, per thousand words, 50 cents.

Difficult copy subject to estimate.

Poems, 1 cent a line, minimum, 25 cents.

SERVICES OF JOHN H. CLIFFORD.

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT.—The department of typing and manuscript preparation in the Student-Writer workshop is under the personal supervision of Mr. John H. Clifford, formerly of prominent New York publishing houses. A brief summary of his experience follows:

On editorial staff American Book Co., schoolbook publishers, 4 years.

On editorial staff National Alumni, publishers of *The Great Events, 20 volumes*.

On Editorial staff University Society, publishers of standard literature, young folks' books, etc.; managing editor of *Booklovers Shakespeare*, 40 vols.; Dickens's works, with notes and critical comments, 30 vols.; *Life and Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 8 vols.; *Standard History of the World*, 10 vols.; *Modern Eloquence*, 10 vols.; *Encyclopedia of Music*, and other standard works.

On editorial staff *Encyclopedia Americana*; wrote many articles for that work.

The opportunity for writers and publishers to obtain such authoritative and experienced help as Mr. Clifford offers in his particular line is unusual. While all of the manuscript preparation in the "workshop" will be under his eye, the charges for particular editorial service by either Mr. Clifford or Mr. Hawkins will be as follows:

Correcting of proof sheets for authors or publishers, per thousand words50
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Recasting of poems with typing, per line 5c, minimum50
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